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1.a.) The Saved Sect

One oft-cited hadith concludes with the teaching that by the end of time Islam would be divided into 73 sects, 72 of which would be in the fire. When asked which would be the saved sect, Muhammad (PBUH) replied to the effect, "Those who follow what I am upon today, and my companions."¹¹

Some Muslims suggest that the above hadith has a weakness in its chain of narrators, others point out that the sheer number of transmitters render the hadith sound. Either way, the fact is that if the Islamic religion is not already divided into 73 sects, it is well on its way. Several sects of Shi'ites, a growing number of extreme Sufis, the Ansar cult, the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyyah (also known as Qadianees), the Koran'ites, and many others present varying profiles of deviancy from the orthodoxy of Sunni Islam. Furthermore, the concept of the saved sect consisting of those who adhere to what the prophet (PBUH) and his companions were upon seems a no-brainer to the confirmed believer.

There are, however, those who propose revision of the Islamic religion on the basis of perceived need to modernize Islam in consideration of the social and political changes of the past 1,400 years. Now, Muslims have historically been some of the most progressive people in the world. The industrial revolution of Europe was largely attributed to knowledge and innovations imported from the Muslim

¹¹ At-Tirmidhi

world, at a time when the aristocracy of Europe routinely sent their children to study in the universities of Muslim Spain. Muslims excelled in language and linguistics, mechanical, optical and theoretical physics, organic and inorganic chemistry, mathematics, agriculture, medicine, geography, and astronomy, to name a few of the sciences and arenas of intellect. Many of the technological advances which paved the way for a better world were invented by Muslims, and the university itself originates from the Muslim design of the higher educational institution.¹¹

So Muslims are not shy to address the issues of their existence and change with the times in matters which do not conflict with religious principles. However, Allah most High conveyed the teaching through His final prophet, Muhammad (PBUH), that He would not accept any change or innovation in religion. As per the hadith of Aa'ishah, Muhammad (PBUH) was recorded as having taught,

"Whoever innovates anything into this affair of ours [i.e., Islam] that does not belong to it, will have it rejected."¹²

So whereas innovation in matters of non-religious practicality may be praiseworthy, there is no room for innovation in religion itself, for all religious innova-

¹¹ For further information, please see the first book in this series, *The First and Final Commandment*, chapter 3.C.8, and *Islam and Science*, by Shabir Ahmed, Anas Abdul Muntaqim, and Abdul-Sattar Siddiq; published by the Islamic Cultural Workshop, P.O. Box 1932, Walnut, CA 91789; (909) 399-4708.

¹² Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawud, Sunan Ibn-Majah.